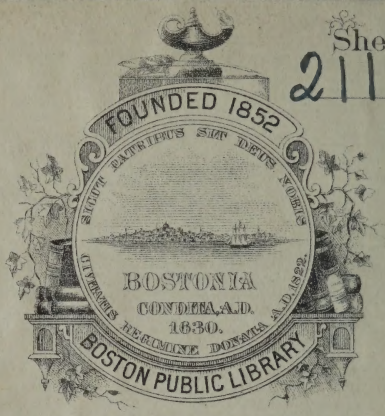
Shelf No.
2118.19



GIVEN BY
Bigelow Fund.
Received,

From Holtrop's Monumens Typographiques.

Printer's House of the 15th century.

WITH THE PUBLISHERS COMPLIMENTS

Who was Caxton?

William Caxton

Merchant, Ambassador, Historian, Author, Translator and Printer.

2118.10

A Monograph.

LONDON:
HARDWICKE & BOGUE,
192, PICCADILLY.
1877.

1877
C
BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

Bi
289.607
Nov 22 77

consequence of the Caxton Celebration being held this year, and the Caxton Exhibition being in full progress at South Kensington, the question is frequently asked "Who was Caxton?" It is hoped that the present slight sketch will give, in a cheap form, a sufficiently accurate and satisfactory account of one who was so great a benefactor to the English race.

August, 1877. *R.H.B.*

Who was Caxton?

ILLIAM CAXTON, the first printer in the English language, who, in 1477, imported from Bruges the art and implements of typography, was born, as he himself tells us, in the county of Kent. In his preface to the "Histories of Troye," he says, "I was born and lerned myn englissh in Kente in the weeld." Of Caxton's parentage no trace has been found; but Mr. Blades,* after much research into the subject, concludes that he probably descended from the Caustons of Hadlow, in the Weald of Kent, Causton and Caxton being synonymous.

* "Biography and Typography of William Caxton." London, Trübner & Co.

A casual mention of his parentage is made by Caxton in his prologue to "Charles the Great," when he refers to his "fader and moder," who "in my youth sette me to scole."

The date of his birth has been variously assumed to have been 1410 or 1412; but from recent investigations by Mr. Blades, it is shown that this must have been 10 years too early, as there is documentary evidence to prove that he was apprenticed in 1438. In the 15th century it was as now the City custom to apprentice youths at 15 or 16 years of age, and there is no reason to suppose that Caxton was an exception to this rule.

In the archives of the Mercers' Company are the particulars of Caxton's apprenticeship. The following extract from the volume, entitled "Warden's Accounts," gives the very day and year of this interesting event. The date is June 24, 1438, and the entry is as follows:—

Entres des Appñtices.

Item John Large / Item Will'm Caxston } les appñtices de Robert Large. } iiijs.

Taking 15 or 16 as the age when Caxton entered his apprenticeship, it will follow that he was born about 1422-3.

Caxton's early years were passed in troublous times. He was the same age as the infant

Henry VI., whose father, the great King Henry V., died in the midst of his triumphs in France, leaving a legacy to his son, which was to be a continual source of future trouble to his country and himself. The hundred years' war with France was fiercely progressing, and, as a boy, Caxton must have heard of the wonderful exploits of Jeanne D'Arc in leading the French to victory against their English enemies, to be rewarded so cruelly by a bitter death.

Philip Duke of Burgundy, noting the declining fortunes of the English had deserted his old allies, a blow which that great warrior, the Duke of Bedford, did not long survive, and the war between the two countries almost came to a standstill.

It was at this period of England's history that Caxton was apprenticed to the great London Mercer, Robert Large.

To be bound to such a personage as Alderman Large was no ordinary privilege, apprentices at this period being, as Wheeler says, "for the most part gentlemen's sonnes," and when we find that Caxton was entered at the same time as one of Large's sons, the two names being bracketed together in the Mercers' books, we may fairly conclude that a friendly connection existed

between the two families, either from business relations or from a relationship of a nearer kind; and the son who was, doubtless, a bright intelligent lad, may have been taken into the family of the Alderman as a companion to John, the two being educated together, possibly under the tutelage of the rector of St. Olave, Old Jewry, their parish church. It is certain that Caxton's education was above the average, and though he mentions being at school when a boy at home, his attainments in after life prove that he must have received a much higher standard of education than would be the lot of a village schoolboy in the 15th century.

Scholarship and literature were at this period in favour by the great. Henry VI. was no exception to the fashion, being more attached to his books than to his crown. This was doubtless owing to the training he had received from the Cardinal Bishop of Winchester, whose name stands high in the annals of that time as one of the most learned ecclesiastics of the day, and to whose guardianship Henry VI. was entrusted when an infant. His example gave a great impetus to education, and the college of Winchester, founded by the King in his twentieth year, still attests to his early love of learning.

We find by the Mercers' Records that Large had no less than nine apprentices, who according to the custom of that period, lived in their master's house, and being all of good birth they would doubtless be treated as members of the family. We know by Large's Will that he had two daughters, Elizabeth and Alice. The latter probably died young and unmarried, the former married a Lord Mayor's son.

In the year after Caxton's apprenticeship, his master was Lord Mayor of London, a position at that time of the very highest standing, and to which only the noblest and richest merchants of the City were elected. The unusual magnificence with which Large's mayoralty was inaugurated, and the concourse that accompanied his procession, proves that he must have been both popular and wealthy.

The house in which Large resided stood at the north-east corner of the Old Jewry, and was one of the most important mansions in the city. It was customary for Lord Mayors in those days, and till 1501, when the Guildhall was first used for the purpose, to entertain their fellow citizens and other guests, at their own houses, or at Grocers' Hall, so that Large's mansion was well adapted for the requirements of his

mayoralty. Stow, in his Survey of London in 1598, when it was still standing, refers to its extensive proportions and the various uses to which it had been put. Caxton, as we have previously noticed, was probably a member of Large's family from an early age, and, if so, would be a playmate not only of John but of Alice, who was some years his junior. Might we not fairly romance on the possibility of an attachment springing up between the two, of Caxton being sent over the sea, with no wish to return home after the death of Alice, an event which, from her not claiming the legacy left by her father's will, must have occurred before she arrived of age. We find when Caxton did marry, it was late in life.

The precise date when our printer went abroad is uncertain, but it was probably within a year of his being apprenticed, as we are informed in his prologue to "The Recuyell" that when he commenced to translate that work in 1469, he had been "thirty years, for the most part in the countries of Brabant, Flanders, Holland and Zetland." Nothing definite, however, can be traced of Caxton during the interval between 1439 and 1449, in which year he is mentioned in the archives of Bruges as being security

for £110. It is not impossible that Caxton's master may have found him even at so early an age as 17 or 18 sufficiently capable both in his knowledge of business and in good address to be trusted abroad as one of his representatives, and that he was in Flanders when Large died.

Large's year of office appears to have been an active one, and must have told on his health, as he did not long survive his mayoralty. He died in 1441, leaving in his will various bequests to his apprentices and servants, William Caxton being put down for "xx marks," a sum equal to £150 of the present day.

At his master's death, Caxton, who had then served three years of his apprenticeship, would still be bound to the executors, and the remaining four years—or until he arrived at the age of 24—would be passed under their control. It is presumed that in 1446 he completed his term and entered into the next stage of his active life by commencing business on his own account at Bruges, at which time he would also receive his legacy.

That he must have prospered during the succeeding three years is shown by his having been able, in 1449, to become security for £110, a sum equal to £1400 of the present day.

Mr. Blades, in his "Biography of Caxton," gives us the full account of the law proceedings relating to this matter, which are still preserved in the archives of the City of Bruges.

In 1453 we find from the records of the Mercers' Company that Caxton was admitted to the Livery of that Company, with two other English Merchants of Bruges, who with him had travelled to London on special business. This seems to have been the first occasion since his departure from England that he had revisited his native land. He was now 31 or 32 years of age, but had already made his mark, and it is probable that affairs of importance connected with the increasing commerce between England and the Low Countries, were the principal cause of his journey. In 1453 the decisive battle of Castillon, where the brave old Talbot and his two sons lost their lives, was fought between the English and French, resulting in the conclusion of the hundred years war. The impetus to the foreign trade of England caused by this sudden change from war to peace, would require the best energies and abilities of the London merchants to meet, and as Caxton's visit to London coincided with this event, we may consider it very probable that his presence

was required by the Wardens of the Mercers' Company to consult on the requirements of the occasion.

The high appreciation in which Caxton and his fellow travellers were held by the Mercers' Company may be inferred from the fact that the fees, usually charged on admission to the Livery, appear to have been remitted on this occasion, having been entirely erased from their records.

It was at this period the custom of merchants in foreign countries to combine together for mutual aid and protection, and in the capital of each country where their business lay, they lived in community with a governor at their head, the laws by which they were ruled being issued by the two countries respectively to which they belonged, and in which they resided. The Merchant Adventurers, or the "English Nation" as this guild was sometimes called, had been formed for the above object, and was one of the oldest chartered companies of the City of London. It was in close connection with the Mercers' Company, by whom it had been originated, and though incorporated at an earlier date than the latter, was under its control, the principal members of the Adventurers being

Mercers, and the Courts of Adventurers being always held at Mercers' Hall. Caxton and his fellow merchants doubtless held long consultations with the wardens of that guild as to the future prospects of the trade with the Low Countries, of which Bruges was the capital. This important city was in its zenith, having been for many years the European metropolis of trade and commerce, lying as it did on the high road to England, which country even at this date received and exported more merchandize than any other country in Europe. Its exports chiefly consisted of wool and cloth, and Philip le Bon, the reigning Duke of Burgundy recognising the value of this trade to his own dominions, afforded every encouragement to the English settlers, and even founded an order with the title of the "Golden Fleece."

This great prince had ruled for more than thirty years with prudence and sagacity, and under his sway the Duchy of Burgundy had become one of the most powerful and wealthy Kingdoms in Europe. No previous Sovereign had done so much to foster the fine Arts and encourage the growing taste for literature, his example being followed by the nobles of his court, who vied with each other in forming

libraries of rich and valuable books, that of the Duke surpassing all others in its store of splendidly bound volumes, so that in Bruges were to be found some of the most skilful scribes and artistic book binders of that age. At no period had this city been in a more flourishing condition. It was the centre not only of commerce but of learning. The love of literature had spread through Europe, and the demand for books exceeded the power and resources of the scriveners to supply it; the fall of Constantinople causing a fresh impetus to this demand, on account of the influx into Western Europe from the East, of manuscripts hitherto unknown. It was thus that the invention of printing by moveable type, like other great inventions, sprang from the necessities of the times and the impossibility of meeting the requirements of the age by other means.

On the accession, in 1461, of Edward IV. to the English throne, that wise and sagacious prince showed his gratitude to the citizens of London for past favours, and earned their lasting goodwill by his liberal grants of charters both to the city and to its various guilds. In the second year of his reign he gave a new charter to the Merchant Adventurers, under

which one William Obray was appointed Governor of "The English Nation residing abroad." Obray, however, was but a short time in power.

We now reach the second important stage in our hero's life, as we find from the Mercers' Records, that Caxton in 1462-3 was performing the duties of Governor, and a letter was received from him by the Wardens of the Company, which was considered of sufficient importance to be forwarded to the Lords of the Council. That Caxton before he had reached his fortieth year should be appointed to such a responsible position, goes far to prove that he was a man of no ordinary talents and industry, and these qualities, combined with a simple piety very rare in those days, especially in such a dissolute city as Bruges, doubtless caused him to be marked out by the Mercers as the right man for this important post.

As Governor of the English Nation, Caxton's duties were in some degree similar to those of an ambassador or consul. He had to reside in a house specially provided for the English Nation. He had entire control of all English subjects residing or trading in Bruges and the Low Countries. To assist him in the performance of his duties as a magistrate and judge he

had the services of twelve men specially elected by "merchants and mariners," who served as jurors, besides six men who acted as bailiffs.

The English Nation was a guild or fellowship common in the middle ages of Europe. Its members lived like monks, in community, and in the strictest celibacy, each having his own dormitory, with a common table for meals.

The trade at this time between the Low Countries and Europe, especially with England, was enormous. Royalty, nobles, and even ecclesiastics bought ships and traded on their own account, with the advantage in many instances of an entire freedom from all duties and other charges. According to Anderson, in his "History of Commerce," more than a hundred ships might be counted at one time in Sluis, the port of Bruges, belonging to various countries of Europe, of which England and Italy owned the largest number.

The experience which Caxton had gained during his residence of nearly a quarter of a century in Flanders, combined with his business habits and strict integrity, was now turned to good account, and we find him prominent in all difficulties connected with the commerce of his country, arranging treaties of trade, receiving

and sending letters to the home authorities, acting as arbitrator in cases of dispute between his countrymen—and sometimes between themselves and foreigners—taking frequent journeys through a marshy country, and doubtless enduring a large amount of fatigue and illness, but always at work, seizing every spare moment for the study of literary treasures; a volume of Chaucer, his favorite author, being probably his travelling companion.

Six or seven years of this work passed by, and we cannot wonder that it told its tale, and that Caxton complains in 1469, before he had reached his 50th year, of old age creeping on him. Possibly about this time he resigned his office of Governor, the exact date being uncertain.

In 1467, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy died, after a reign of nearly fifty years. He was succeeded by his son, the Count of Charolais, Charles the Bold, whose character was in striking contrast to that of his father.

The early life of Charles has been a favorite theme with French Historians. Olivier a la Marche says of him, "he was prudent, open handed, truthful, and cultivated such manners and such virtues that I never read of, nor have I seen so virtuous a young prince."

This account of Charles is confirmed by other writers, who are loud in their praises of his accomplishments and personal beauty, and though in after life ambitious dreams of conquest and empire, combined with great obstinacy, led him into scenes of blood and disaster, his character was ever that of a knightly gentleman, fearless and without reproach. He was now in the 34th year of his age, and had been twice a widower. On his accession to the throne the young Duke inaugurated a new era at his father's court, by thoroughly reforming it, and introducing a strict state and ceremonial manners in place of the laxity and freedom which previously existed.

Edward IV. perceiving the advantage of a close alliance with so powerful a neighbour, sent Lord Hastings and Scales, the queen's brother, early the following year to negociate a treaty of marriage between Charles and the young princess Margaret, the King's sister. Lord Scales was subsequently created Earl Rivers, and became Caxton's close friend and patron, the first book issued by Caxton with a date, and probably the first he printed in England, having been translated from the French by the Earl.

This nobleman, one of the most accomplished courtiers of the time, was accompanied by

the learned John Russell, a consummate master of languages and of elocution. A more fitting pair of ambassadors to be entrusted with so delicate an errand could scarcely have been selected. On their arrival at Bruges, they would in the usual course be introduced to the Governor of the English nation, and from this time we may date the commencement of a long and cordial friendship between Lord Hastings and Caxton, whose religious sentiments and literary tastes appear to have harmonized in all respects.

The Duke of Burgundy being also desirous of strengthening his alliance with Edward, the treaty was soon settled, and in the following June the marriage was celebrated at Bruges, with the utmost splendour, many English nobles being present, as doubtless was Caxton himself.

A fresh era in our hero's life now set in. It is probable that about this time he was introduced to the young Duchess, who, in a strange land, and surrounded by foreigners, would be only too glad to avail herself of the services of a fellow countryman thoroughly versed in the French and Flemish languages, and from his long residence in Bruges quite able to give her satisfactory replies and explanations to all her

queries. In what capacity he eventually entered the service of the Duchess is not known, but it was probably as private secretary and amanuensis.

Meantime we hear of him in various ways, Mr. Blades has given extracts from the Mercers' Records shewing that in September, 1468, Caxton, while still Governor, and residing at Bruges, formed, with two others from England, an embassy from Edward IV. to the Duke of Burgundy, for the "enlarging of woollen cloth in his dominions," the mission entirely succeeding in its objects.

From the archives of the City of Bruges, Mr. Blades also shows that Caxton and another were appointed arbitrators in a disputed case between an Englishman and a Genoese merchant. There is another document in the archives of Bruges, dated August 13th, 1469, containing a list of persons who were entitled to the "vins d'honneur," among whom was Caxton, but whether as "governor" is not shown.

In the following year, the Duke of Burgundy was invested with the Order of the Garter, at Ghent, where Dr. Russell again makes his appearance as orator. The Latin oration delivered by him on this occasion was afterwards printed at Bruges by Caxton, who was in all probability, present at the investment.

We have now arrived at the most interesting and important question connected with Caxton's life, viz. : why and when he became a printer, and from whom he learnt the art. In March, 1469, Caxton commenced his translation of "Le Recueil des Histoires de Troyes." It appears from his prologue to this work, "The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye," that, happening to have some time on his hands, he took up the French book, with which he was so well pleased, that he thought it would be a good thing to translate it into English for the benefit of his countrymen at home and abroad.

So he set to work, but after writing five or six quires–or forty pages–he wearied with it, and put it on one side. Two years elapsed, when one day while the Duchess, in whose service Caxton was now definitely settled, was conversing with him on various matters, the subject of "Le Recueil" was introduced. He bethought him of his attempt at translation and mentioned it to his mistress, who at once requested him to shew it to her. She pointed out some faults in his English, and then "commanded" him to finish the translation of the book, which he lost no time in doing, making such progress that in six months he had completed it.

But now comes the question whether the copy he eventually gave the Duchess was in manuscript or printed.

Caxton tells us in his gossiping way that he commenced his translation on March 1st, 1468, (this would be really 1469, as the Flanders year was then reckoned from Easter to Easter), continued it at Ghent, and "finysshid" it at Cologne, September 19th, 1471. This seems plain enough, but Caxton goes on to say that his eyes and hand were tired of much writing, and, having promised copies to several of his friends, he had practised and learned at his great charge and expense to ordain (or set out) the said book in print, "which book," he continues, "I have presented to my sayd redoubted lady, and she hath well accepted hit, and largely rewarded me." Now here we have Caxton's own version of his first attempt at printing a book, and the evidence seems to show that, although he made and presented fair copies of the three books as he completed these copies, yet that he made no more than these, but at once began to set the book in print. This would take about a year, possibly less, as he would be anxious to get it finished for his numerous patrons; and we may presume that when he arrived at the last

page he struck off a single impression of that page, with which he perfected, and bound up a complete book and presented it to the Duchess, as the proud result of our printer's wonderful talent and energy. Caxton would then add to the epilogue of the third book the words above quoted, and issue all future volumes—probably only one hundred in all, as they are now seen.

Let us here gather up the fragments of history connected with the life of Caxton at this eventful period, and weave them into a brief story, founded partly on facts and partly on circumstantial evidence.

In the position which Caxton held at the court of Bruges, he would be constantly having brought before him specimens of typography, through the various channels by which the art was gradually spreading throughout Europe, a man of his mental calibre would quickly recognise the great value of an invention, which to a literary mind at that age would have a special charm. We have seen that the very first leisure hours in his active life were seized upon to write something for the benefit of his countrymen, and there can be little doubt that he eagerly availed himself of the patronage of the Duchess, to resign his mercantile pursuits and official position,

in order to throw his whole time and energies into the new pursuit.

That the Duchess, on her part, should encourage him was natural. Her husband was a soldier, whose object in life was to aggrandize himself at the expense of his neighbours, and to realize the dreams of his early manhood by raising Burgundy into an Empire. His marriage with the sister of Edward IV. was a political one, dictated principally by the hope of assistance from the English king against his ancient antagonists, the French, with whom and with other enemies the Duke was constantly in arms. Consequently the Duchess seldom saw her husband, and being highly educated, and having no children, would naturally turn to literature as a welcome relief in her quiet court life. Hence we find that Caxton, whose sterling worth must have been fully appreciated by his mistress, found in her a ready patron and sympathising friend.

The royal commission to turn into English the favourite history of the time, was soon known, both in Burgundy and England, and was followed by the usual results. Caxton had scarcely commenced his translation when the nobles of the court were also desirous of having

copies, and "dyversse gentilmen and frendes" were promised "the sayd book," so that Caxton, finding it would be impossible to supply these wants in manuscript, resolved with his usual energy to learn the art of printing.

Among the various examples which had come before him there would probably be specimens of Ulric Zel's typography. This printer had four years previously left Mentz, the birthplace of the new art, and settled at Cologne, where he had made a successful beginning, and his name as a printer was already well known. We learn from Caxton himself that at this time he went to Cologne, and may therefore reasonably conclude that his object in going to that city was to accomplish the important design he had in view.

On his way he sojourned for a short time at Ghent, where he doubtless had friends, and here he continued his translation, but it was to the "Holy City" that his thoughts turned with the longings of a mind deeply imbued with the religious sentiments of the age, and with the determination of succeeding in his great purpose.

The new discovery was at this time kept very secret by those who worked it, and it was only

by the expenditure of large sums of money that Caxton would be enabled to obtain the knowledge he so anxiously desired. The same talents which had raised him to a high position, as merchant and negotiator, would now be employed to good purpose, and it is probable that when he left Cologne, after five months stay, he had not only completed his work of translation, but had become possessed of the chief rudiments of the art of printing. From the fact that Caxton's books for some years were not spaced out evenly, and their being printed page by page, instead of two pages at a time, we may infer that during the short period Caxton was at Cologne, he merely learnt sufficient from Ulric Zel to enable him to make a fair beginning on his return to Bruges.

It is not improbable that this master was paid a large sum by Caxton to cut and cast him a fount of type, in as close imitation, as possible, of the Bâtarde manuscript, and that the broad German character, which pervades the first typographical efforts of our printer, is due to this cause; no one, however, can gaze upon the clearly cut and well shaped letters of this beautiful fount without at once recognising a master hand in its production, though that hand was

evidently more accustomed to imitate German than French manuscript.

How long Caxton stayed at Cologne after the nineteenth day of September, 1471, when he tells us he finished his translation, is quite uncertain, but it would probably be within a month. Caxton returned to Bruges, and made fair copies of the three books forming the Recuyell, which were duly presented to the Duchess.

That these were fairly written out in manuscript by himself, there can be little doubt, as the professional scribes of that country were accustomed only to the French language; so that when we come to consider the work of translating and writing such a book, consisting altogether of 700 pages folio, we cannot wonder that Caxton should complain of his eyes being "dimed with overmoche lokyng on the whit paper."

We may here observe that in his translation Caxton must have considerably expanded his original copy, Le Recueil, which, when afterwards printed in the same type and size of page, made up only 568 pages.

On arriving at Bruges, Caxton lost no time in getting together his printing materials. The press could easily be made by any bookbinding

press maker. He might, in the first instance, have merely utilised a bookbinder's press. The paper, also, could readily be procured, and the ink, which required much care in its preparation, would be made by himself, but this at first was very thin and unsatisfactory in its working.

To engage an assistant was his next step, and it is probable that he selected a young man named Wynken de Worde (or de Worth), a Fleming of intelligence and some education, to set up the type, pull the press, and assist generally in the work. An English youth named Richard Pynson was also one of his assistants. The former ultimately succeeded to the business of his master at Westminster, and the latter was appointed in 1509 King's printer.

For many years there had lived, at Bruges, a skilful French caligrapher, named Colard Mansion. He was patronized by the nobles of the court at Bruges to a considerable extent, and produced some of the finest manuscript books of that age. The Duke of Burgundy, on one occasion, gave him fifty-four livres for a novel called Romuleon, splendidly illuminated and bound in velvet. This book is now to be seen in the Royal Library of Brussels, and another copy is in the British Museum.

Colard Mansion must have been well known to Caxton, and that he was taken into his confidence and aided him in many ways, both by advice and practical help, there can be little doubt, especially in the printing of the French "Recueil des Histoires de Troye," a work which Caxton would have found very difficult to accomplish alone; and we find that after his return to England, although he translated several books from the French, he printed none in that language. Colard Mansion, on the contrary, was a thorough French scholar, who knew little of English, and printed entirely in French.*

From 1472 to 1476 we find only five works printed in the German face type, but this may be accounted for in several ways. In the first place, the type he brought from Cologne would necessarily be a small fount. The whole number of sorts was 163, and each sort would take at least two hours to cut, so that if Caxton was in Cologne five months, at least two months would

* Mr. Blades is of opinion that Caxton was indebted for his knowledge of printing entirely to Colard Mansion, to whom he attributes the production of Caxton's first type as well as the second; but with all respect and deference to the judgment of so distinguished an authority, we venture to submit that it requires only a slight examination and comparison of the two types to show that they could not have been cut by the same hand.

be spent in preparing matrices, allowing three letters a day; and another month, or more, would be spent in casting the type. One month might have been passed in negociations with Ulric Zel.* We must also take into consideration that, although Caxton might have received some slight instruction from Ulric Zel, yet he was a novice in the art, and had to teach his assistants; his duties too as private secretary to the Duchess of Burgundy must have absorbed much of his time.

We may imagine Caxton's feelings when he saw his first printed book complete, ready to present to the Duchess; and we can easily conceive her pride and delight as an Englishwoman as she gazed on the first book printed in her own language, and with what attention she listened to her countryman as he explained to his mistress in the words of his epilogue, that it was "begun in one day and also finished in one day," that is to say, each page was struck off as it was set up, according to the number of copies required; the letters were then distributed and re-set for the next page, and so on. This

* In comparing Caxton's first type with Ulric Zel's, it will be found that several of the combination letters and others are almost identical.

process may have been partly owing to the size of his press and partly to the smallness of his fount, but the result would necessarily be as Caxton has described it.

The English "Recuyell" having met with so much success, it was thought advisable to bring out the French edition, "Le Recueil des Histoires de Troye," in the composition of which, it is probable that Colard Mansion had the chief share.

The next book which issued from Caxton's press was "The Game and Playe of the Chess Moralized," in 1474, and it is singular that this is the only book in the first type which has a date.*

Only two other books have been found, both of which are in French and without a date, and we may safely assume that these were the productions of Colard Mansion, Caxton having by this time got to work on a new type; and it is probable that the old fount which must have been well worn, was soon after 1476 entirely discarded by Caxton if not by Mansion.

It would seem that after three or four years'

* The early printers allowed it to be supposed that their books were in ordinary manuscript; consequently for many years no particulars of the means by which they were produced would be inserted.

use of the German cut fount of letters, Caxton determined to have a fresh one more resembling the caligraphy of the age, and accordingly we find a series of books printed from the new type, without place or date, apparently between 1475 and 1477. This type, from the sorts contained in it, was evidently the production of a French workman, and intended for printing books in that language. The first time it was used was probably for "Les Quatre Derrennieres Choses."*

Colard Mansion, as a skilful caligrapher, would, like so many other scribes of that period, naturally take to cutting letters intended to represent the character of his own writing, and under Caxton's direction, and with a little practice would soon succeed in producing a satisfactory result. It is, therefore, quite possible that Mansion cut this second type for Caxton, and also a larger one of the same character, which he used independently; but it is

* From a comparison of the various types which Caxton used during the time he was a printer, it may be inferred, that in some of the founts the capitals were not cut by the same hand as the smaller or lower-case letters. It is very doubtful whether Caxton cut a single letter himself, but that, with the exception of his original fount, he imported his type from France and Holland.

equally possible that both were imported from Paris.*

"Les Quatre Derrennieres Choses," printed in Caxton's original type, principally by the aid of Colard Mansion, was found in the British Museum by Mr. J. Winter Jones, bound up with the "Meditacions," one of the three French books printed in Caxton's first type, and in the same covers as when first purchased by their original owner. Both copies are unique.

Among the books printed by Caxton at Bruges in the No. 2 type are the Latin oration of John Russell, delivered in 1469, when the Duke of Burgundy was invested with the Order of the Garter, at Ghent, and the "History of Jason," dedicated to the young Prince of Wales.

There is no evidence to show where Caxton's workshop was situated, but it was most probably a room over the porch of St. Donatus' church, in Bruges, as we find that Colard Mansion after Caxton's departure was located in that room, and it is not unlikely that on his departure from Bruges, our printer left Mansion in possession.

* A Bruges printer, named John Brito, about 1479, made use of a type very similar to this second type of Caxton's, and another Printer, Jan Valdener, of Utrecht in 1480 used a type, in many respects but not entirely, identical with Brito's.

The year 1476 was a sad one for Caxton and his mistress. The Duke of Burgundy, after six years of constant warfare with his neighbours, was still desperately, but vainly, struggling after that shadow of empire, which he had so long and obstinately pursued. On June 21, 1476, was fought the bloody battle of Morat, between the Duke and the Swiss, which resulted in the ruin of the Burgundian power. In the following January, the Duke, while engaged in a murderous battle at Nanci, was overpowered and fell, covered with wounds, stubbornly fighting to the last.

Caxton's mistress was now no longer the ruling power at the court of Bruges. The young daughter of the late Duke succeeded as the reigning sovereign, and the Dowager Duchess of Burgundy resigned her position at Court, retiring into comparative privacy on a handsome jointure. Caxton's services as secretary would now be no longer required by the Duchess in her altered position, and, from the same cause, he would also lose many of his former friends at court. This sudden and important change in the state of affairs at Bruges no doubt decided Caxton in any wish he might naturally have felt to return to his native land, and certainly his prospects of future

employment were now more favourable at the English Court, where Edward IV., firmly established on his throne, would look with favour on the old merchant, whose sympathies had always been with the Yorkists.

Taking with him his new fount of type, his tools and his two assistants, Caxton, therefore, with his wife and daughter, embarked for London.

On his arrival there he would naturally make an early visit to his brethren at Mercers' Hall. He had now reached his fifty-fifth year, and having been abroad nearly all his life he would know but little of the customs and habits of London life. His first object would be to find a house, and probably he was assisted in this matter by the Mercers, as it was not long before we find him settled at Westminster, in a tenement held by that Company of the Abbots of Westminster.

It has been erroneously assumed that because Caxton in some of his "colophons" or conclusions to his books uses the words "emprynted in th'Abbey of Westminster," that his printing press was set up in one of the chapels. But as Mr. Blades observes, "It will be noticed that although the precise expression, *Printed in the Abbey of Westminster*, is affixed to some books,

yet the more general phrase *Printed at Westminster* is also used, and evidently refers to the same locality, for otherwise we must suppose Caxton to have carried on two separate printing-offices for many years. The word 'Abbey' did not assume its modern sense, as applying only to the fabric, until after the Reformation; and the phrase 'dwelling at Westminster,' used in 1484, just *after* 'printed in the Abbey,' 1483, and *before* 'printed in the Abbey,' 1485, proves that Caxton himself attached to the word no very restrictive idea. We find also, from the above-mentioned advertisement, that 'Westminster' in that instance meant 'The Almonesrye,' where Caxton occupied a tenement, called 'The Red-pale.' The Almonry was a space within the Abbey precincts, where alms were distributed to the poor; and here the Lady Margaret, mother of King Henry VII., and one of Caxton's patronesses, built almshouses. Other houses were also there; and we therefore conclude that by the words *in the Abbey* Caxton meant nothing more than that he resided within the Abbey precincts."

The Almonry was situated west-south-west of the Abbey, and here Caxton established himself in his tenement under the sign of the Red Pale.

Every house of business at that period, and until the middle of the last century, was distinguished by its sign, which was hung out in front. The printers of the 15th century adopted coats of arms for this purpose, and Caxton chose one with a red band down the centre of the shield, termed in heraldry a "pale," as shown in the wood-cut:

hence the name of Caxton's sign, which he calls the "Reed Pale," in the well-known advertisement:—

If it plese ony man spirituel or temporel to bye ony pyes of two and thre comemoracios of salisburi use enpryntid after the forme of this preset lettre whiche ben wel and truly correct late hym come to westmonester in to the almonesrye at the reed pale and he shal haue them good chepe . . .

Supplico stet cedula.

Caxton commenced his career at Westminster under good patronage, Edward IV. and his court being among his best supporters, among whom were also Earl Rivers, the Earl of Warwick, the Countess of Richmond, and in later times Richard III. and Henry VII. The first book which he produced at Westminster, with the place and date of printing fully inserted, was the "Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers," in November, 1477. To his old patron Earl Rivers, who had translated it from the French, was Caxton indebted for the commission to print this book. This nobleman, who had renewed the friendship commenced ten years before at Bruges, afterwards gave him several other translations to print, and, until his treacherous murder by Richard III. in 1483, was Caxton's staunch friend.

The fact that Caxton must have been married before he came to England has been recently brought to light by Mr. Gairdner of the Record office, who in 1874 discovered some papers received from the Chapter House at Westminster a copy of a deed of separation between "Gerard Croppe and Elizabeth, daughter of William Caxton," dated May 20th, 1496. It is probable that Caxton was married soon after

he entered the service of the Duchess of Burgundy, about 1469, and his daughter would have been about 21 years old at her father's death. In the Churchwarden's Accounts of St. Margaret's, Westminster, Caxton's parish church, is the following entry, dated 1490:—

Item atte bureying of Mawde Caxton for torches and tapers iii*s.* ij*d.*

It is not at all improbable that this refers to Caxton's wife.

In the same accounts for 1478 is a previous entry referring probably to Caxton's father.

Item the day of burying of William Caxton for ij. torchis and iiij. tapers at a lowe masse xx*d.*

It would seem that the family resided together under the shadow of the old Abbey, and doubtless held a high position in the parish of St. Margaret.

From the character of the books which Caxton translated and printed towards the close of his life, it would appear that he had a presentiment of his approaching end. It is not improbable that troubles came upon him in his latter days. The death of his wife must have been a heavy blow to the good man. Possibly his only daughter formed that unhappy union which we have mentioned, or illness may have overtaken

him; but whatever may have been the cause, he seems to have felt that his time was short, and he set to work more arduously than ever. In the year previous to his death he printed no less than sixteen books, the greater number being his own translations from the Latin and French. Some of these were finished just before his death, such as "The Art and Craft to know well to die," a tract called "The twelve profits of tribulation," "The seven points of true love and everlasting wisdom," &c. It would seem, however, that others, which he had prepared, were completed if not entirely printed by Wynken de Worde, Caxton's successor; for instance, "The Chastising of God's Children," and "Ars Moriendi, that is the Craft for to die for the health of men's soul."

His last effort was a translation, from a French work, of the Lives of the Fathers, which, like the Venerable Bede, he finished on the day of his death. So we learn from the colophon, or ending, which was added by Wynken de Worde, who printed the book.

Among the parish records previously quoted is found the following entry of fees paid at the burial of Caxton in St. Margaret's churchyard, the date being 1491.

Item atte Burying of William Caxton for iiij torches vj*s.* viij*d.*

Item for the belle atte same bureying vj*d.*

"These rates," says Mr. Blades, "are considerably above those paid by the majority of the parishioners," which is a further confirmation of Caxton's high position in his parish. He was, doubtless, looked up to by all classes as the learned printer. With his simple manners and unostentatious scholarship, he would be at home with every one, from the little child to the great Abbot himself, and we can easily imagine the pleasant conferences which took place between the two neighbours.*

From the following entries in the records of St. Margarets it would appear that Caxton left a will, but after much research no trace of it has been found:—

It^m. receyued by the handes of William Ryolle for oone of thoo printed bokes that were bequothen to the Churche behove by William Caxston, vj*s.* viij*d.*

It^m. receyued by the handes of the said William for a nother of the same printed Bokes called a legend.

It^m. by the handes of the parisshe prest for a nother of the same legendes, vj*s.* viij*d.*

* John Esteney was Abbot during the whole of Caxton's life at Westminster.

At the end of this account—

Memor and', there remayneth in store to the said Church.

It^m. in bokes called legendes of the bequest of William Caxton, xiij*d.*

There are other entries of the same character, showing that our printer left a considerable number of books to his parish.

Considering the age when he entered upon his new occupation the result of Caxton's labours was prodigious. His translations alone consisted of 4,500 printed pages chiefly folio, while the total amount of printed matter which he produced between 1477 and 1491 was 18,000 pages.

Unfortunately there is no authentic portrait of our printer. Several are extant, but not one of them is genuine. We must therefore be satisfied with imagination on this subject.

With regard to his character, however, we are on safer ground. Whether in the family of a London merchant prince, or residing at a foreign capital and among the temptations of a luxurious court, the principles of William Caxton never varied. No stain of any kind rests upon his character. With all his love of chivalry and romance he printed nothing even in that

licentious age, without the object, as he himself relates, of promoting "courtesy, humanity, hardiness, love, and virtue," and of "inflaming the hearts of his readers and hearers to eschew works vicious and dishonest." Although Caxton, as the pioneer in England of the printing art, will ever be entitled to the undying gratitude of his country, his name will also be remembered as having been the principal agent in lifting English literature from its low position, and fostering the growth of a purer taste among his countrymen, which blossomed out during the following century in the greatest poets and writers the world has ever seen.

We will now conclude, in Caxton's own phraseology, "Here endeth the little book named 'Who was Caxton?'" a question we have endeavoured to answer in as succinct a manner as was possible with the subject, and trust that the reader will criticise with a kindly eye the many faults which, doubtless, exist in this attempt to piece together, in a small compass, facts and probabilities. The writer has ventured in one part of our printer's history to take a rather different view of the subject than

has hitherto been suggested, but looking at the scanty amount of knowledge we possess, it seemed one which might be fairly adopted, and he must leave the verdict of opinion to his readers.

To Mr. William Blades the author is indebted for the use of two wood-cuts from the Biography of Caxton, a work which has also supplied him with much of his information.

Boston Public Library
Central Library, Copley Square

Division of
Reference and Research Services

The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.

Please do not remove cards from this pocket.

JUN 1 8 1951